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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANJUL 000234

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DAKAR PLS PASS ODC, DAO, AND RAO

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SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: THE MILITARY GETS ITS FIRST GENERAL

REF: BANJUL 217 (NOTAL)

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4 (B AND D)

APPOINTMENT OF FIRST GENERAL

¶1. (C) The GOTG announced May 2 President Yahya Jammeh's decision to promote Chief of Defense Staff (CHOD) Lang Tombong Tamba from the rank of Colonel to that of Brigadier General. Tamba thus becomes the first Gambian military officer to achieve the rank of General. The appointment occurred amidst persistent rumors that, following the abortive coup plot here in March 2006, Jammeh continues to harbor suspicions about the loyalty of elements within the armed forces. Our sources interpret Tamba's promotion as a move by Jammeh to ensure the former's ongoing support.

ETHNIC ANGLE

¶2. (C) Some contacts also see the move as part of an effort by Jammeh gradually to increase the presence of members of his Jola tribe in leading military and security positions. They note, on this score, the recent promotions of other Jolas -- that of Benedict Jammeh, as Inspector General of Police (reftel), and of another relatively senior military officer, Musa Jammeh, from the rank of Captain to that of Major. (NOTE: There are credible reports of Musa Jammeh's involvement in torture of detainees picked up following the abortive coup plot. END NOTE)

COMMENT

¶3. (C) The Gambian President's personnel moves of late warrant careful monitoring, as they may well be designed to place more Jolas in key slots in the GOTG's military and security institutions. As for The Gambian military's first-ever Brigadier General, he is an IMET graduate and we find him generally well disposed toward the U.S. and, for the most part, supportive of the bilateral military relationship.

As for the newly promoted Major Musa Jammeh, to our knowledge he has not participated in IMET or other U.S.-sponsored military cooperation programs, and his reported involvement in human rights abuses rules out such participation in the future. END COMMENT
STAFFORD